

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 4865

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E.O. 11652:: NA

TAGS: PINS

SUBJ: TERRORISM: CONVERSATION WITH FONMIN DEPUTY SYG ZAKARIA

1. FONMIN DEPUTY SYS (POLITICAL) ZAKARIA WAS PRESENT IN THE GOM OPERATIONS CENTER EITHER HERE AT THE AIA BUILDING OR AT THE AIRPORT THROUGHOUT THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED TERRORISM INCIDENT.

HE IS IN EFFECT THE NUMBER 2 MAN AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND IN A NOT YET FULL DEFINED WAY, SEEMS TO BE RESPONSIBLE WITHIN THE MINISTRY FOR TERRORISM TO THE DEGREE ANYONE HAS RESPONSIBILITY. GOM DOES NOT HAVE A POSITION ON INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM OTHER THAN BEING AGAINST IT, BUT RECENT INCIDENT HAS SUGGESTED TO ZAKARIA, AMONG OTHERS, THAT IT SHOULD.

2. ON THE AFTERNOON OF AUG 14, ZAKARIA MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS IN A MUSING AND SPECULATIVE VEIN: THROUGHOUT THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED INCIDENT, GOM AND PARTICULARLY FONMIN OFFICIALS WERE CONSCIOUS OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS. IN THE SHORT RUN, AND CLEARLY THIS WAS OVERRIDING, THEY WERE PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN SAVING THE LIVES OF THE HOSTAGES. THIS MEANT, OF COURSE, ONCE THE JAPANESE HAD DECIDED TO RELASE PRISONERS, CONCENTRATION ON THE PROBLEM OF GETTING THE JAL AIRPLANE INTO THE AIR AND FINDING A PLACE FOR IT TO PUT DOWN. WHEN
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THIS HAD BEEN SUCCESSFULLY ACCOMPLISHED, IT WAS

NATURAL THAT AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT THERE WOULD BE A FEELING OF RELIEF AND INDEED A FEELING OF SUCCESS. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE PERSONALLY AND OTHER (UNIDENTIFIED) GOM OFFICIALS WERE CONSCIOUS THAT THE LONG RUN OBJECTIVE OF COMBATTING AND DETERRING INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM HAD NOT BE ACHIEVED AND HAD POSSIBLY BEEN DAMAGED. THE OPERATION HAD BEEN A BRILLIANT SUCESS FOR THE TERRORISTS. THE PROBLEM NOW WAS WHAT TO DO.

3. ZAKARIA ACKNOWLEDGED THAT OTHER PEOPLE, INCLUDING ME, FELT THAT THE MALAYSIANS SHOULD BE TALKING TO THE LIBYANS. THAT WAS FINE IN PRINCIPLE, BUT WHAT WERE THE MALAYSIANS TO SAY TO THE LIBYANS? IN FACT, AS I KNEW, THE LIBYANS HAD BEEN VERY RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT THE PLANE AND HAD DONE SO UNDER PRESSURE AND FOR WHAT THE GOM FIRMLY BELIEVED WERE ONLY HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS - NOT FOR POLITICAL REASONS. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE GOM TO BE ANYTHING BUT GRATEFUL FOR LIBYAN ACTION AND THEREFORE IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE GOM TO MAKE ANY DEMANDS ON THE LIBYANS.

4. ZAKARIA DID NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF QUIET CONVERSATIONS WITH LIBYANS AND "PERHAPS OTHERS" BUT STILL WAS DOUBTFUL ABOUT WHAT PRECISELY COULD BE SAID. TO SAY ANYTHING THAT SUGGESTED THE GOM DID NOT BELIEVE THE LIBYANS HAD BEEN GENUINELY RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT THE TERRORISTS WOULD BE INSULTING AND UNTRUE. FURTHERMORE, IT WAS ABSOLUTELY PREDICTABLE THAT AS A RESULT OF INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM THE LIBYANS WERE FEELING DEFENSIVE AT THE MOMENT AND NOT IN A MOOD TO LISTEN TO ANYBODY. HE CONCLUDED, HOWEVER, THAT IT WAS NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT THE GOM WOULD DECIDE TO HAVE SOME QUIET CONVERSATIONS.

5. TURNING TO PUBLIC TREATMENT OF THE INCIDENT HERE IN MALAYSIA, ZAKARIA SAID THAT IT WAS TIME FOR PEOPLE TO STOP CONGRATULATING THEMSELVES AND TO SAY SOME THINGS PUBLICLY THAT WOULD MAKE IT CLEAR THAT TERRORISTS WOULD NOT FIND AN EASY MARK IN THIS COUNTRY. ALTHOUGH THERE WOULD BE SOME HYPOCRICY INVOLVED, HE OBSERVED WITH A QUIET SMILE, IT WAS PROBABLY NECESSARY FOR THE GOM TO MAKE CONFIDENTIAL

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STATEMENTS SUGGESTING THAT IT WOULD TAKE A MUCH TOUGHER STANCE NEXT TIME.

6. COMMENT: NOTHING ZAKARIA SAYS REPRESENTS GOM POLICY AT THIS POINT. FURTHERMORE, PRIME MINISTER RAZAK AND HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER GHAZALIE SHAFIE WILL BE THE MAJOR DETERMINERS OF ANY POLICY ON THE SUBJECT. ZAKARIA'S COMMENTS DO ILLUSTRATE,

HOWEVER, THAT WITHIN THE GOM THOUGHTFUL OFFICIALS,
ALTHOUGH HAPPY AT THE RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES, ARE
CONCERNED ABOUT THE LONGER RANGE EFFECTS OF THIS JRA
SUCCESS. IF WE HAVE ANTHING COGENT TO SAY TO GOM
ON THIS SUBJECT, ZAKARIA WOULD BE ONE OF THE CHANNELS
THROUGH WHOM WE WOULD WISH TO WORK.
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